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# Parenting the Preschooler

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## Encouraging Respectful Behavior

Adults often comment that today's young people aren't respectful. If that's true, adults need to remember that children learn by watching other's behaviors.

### **To Learn Respect, Children Must First Be Respected**

Parents and caregivers can do many things to show respect for a child.

**Apologize to children when you are wrong.** Just as you would apologize to another adult when you are wrong, it is important to tell a child you are sorry. Apologies that are specific and simple show children that you respect their feelings. It's a good way to show that it's all right to make mistakes and admit it. It can bring you closer with love, understanding, and trust.

**Be courteous and respectful in ordinary daily requests.** The example parents set is the most powerful influence on children. Showing real interest in the feelings of others and sharing your time and energy with others are clear examples of compassion and selflessness. Talk about your thoughts and motives for respecting others with your child.

**Use polite words.** Words like please, thank you, excuse me show that you care about others. You

can't expect a child to use good manners if the adults in their life don't use them.

**Avoid disciplining in public, especially in front of their friends.** It is helpful when disciplining to establish rules and set limits BEFORE you are in public with your child. If the child knows the rules and breaks them, then a simple comment on your part will suffice and there need not be a big public scene. Use gentle physical contact and normal tone of voice to guide the child, rather than grabbing, yelling, or threatening. The goal is to enforce the rules in a non-threatening way that does not embarrass the child, but encourages self-control and maintains everyone's self-respect.

**Allow your children privacy.** As children develop, they need privacy. They learn to set boundaries around their bodies, ideas and possessions. When parents respect their children's need for privacy they will get some for themselves.

**Teach and enforce the "Please Stop" rule.** This is effective in teaching respect for one another by expecting that if someone in the family asks another member to "please stop," the behavior must be stopped immediately. This technique works best when it is begun very early. But it applies to all family members.

## Respect Can Be Taught

Not only must children be treated respectfully, but parents and caregivers must also work to teach respect. Here are some strategies.

**Help children feel good about themselves.** Be a positive person. Compliment your children when they do something well.

**Show approval when children show empathy and caring.** When your child shows consideration for someone else, show your approval.

**Provide acceptance and love.** Send your child messages of love by showing (doing things), telling (I love it when...), or touching (a big hug).

**Help children focus on the feelings of others.** Encourage empathy in young children by making them aware of other's feelings. It is especially important to let your child know when he makes you feel good or bad. Let your child know that you expect them to care about your feelings and show sensitivity to you.

**Talk about the negative effect of selfishness and help children develop a sense of morality.** Discussing moral decisions such as cheating, aggression, stealing, and selfishness with your children can encourage your children to monitor themselves and strengthen their feelings of empathy.

**Bring up caring, fairness, and cooperation in everyday situations.** In daily situations at home and in the community, demonstrate your willingness to be fair and cooperate with others.

**Model self-respect.** Develop your own interests, goals, and strengths. Be positive about yourself and others. Use your sense of humor to keep things in perspective. Realize that you will make mistakes, but forgive yourself. Remember that you are a worthwhile person.

**Encourage your children to find ways to help others.** Volunteer as a family. For example, invite an elderly person for a meal, pet-sit for a neighbor when they are away, or get involved in a community event.

## Respectful Assertiveness

Some parents fear that a compassionate child will be bullied or considered a "wimp" by other children. However, children who are respectful are judged by others as high in "character" and are among the most popular and successful. Teach your child respectful assertiveness skills, how to respectfully assert themselves and stand up for their rights. For example, when confronted by a bully, teach your child how to answer without using threats, name-calling, or put-downs. One method to help your child is to role-play situations such as a selfish child who thinks only of herself and wants everything. Act out the scene offering your child tips for dealing with the situation.

The need for people to live in harmony with one another is increasing. Encourage your children to respect themselves and others. In a society concerned with violence, you can help your child learn skills of cooperation, support, and empathy.

### Source:

Respect Lesson, Positive Parenting II, Minnesota Extension Service, University of Wisconsin-Extension. 1997.

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